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WHAT TO BUY?

Richard Fox

I don't find shopping that much fun and shopping for gifts isn't my favourite thing to do. It's not that I don't like giving presents, it's that I struggle to find the right gift.

So, I often leave it to the last minute to buy the gift. It's not because I'm lazy - well I don't think so. It's usually because I've sweated over what to buy and I can't make up my mind or I can't find what I was looking for.

Sometimes even my good ideas seem silly when it comes to actually buying the gift.

With Christmas fast approaching, my stress levels have gone up again. What should I buy?

Thankfully my wife buys most of the presents for our family which only leaves me to buy a few of them, including a present for my wife. It's not that she is difficult to buy for, its more the stress I get myself into, thinking about it and wanting it to be really special for her.

How do you go with buying presents for someone special? Is it easy or difficult? What if it was for someone very special and you wanted it to be perfect?

Thinking about gifts reminds of the wise men in the Christmas nativity story. I wonder if they were stressed about what gift to bring the new born king?

Imagine, these wise men from the East had been tracking stars and their meanings for years. Then suddenly a special star appears. All of their studies and observations had told them that a new king had been born. So they planned to visit him. But they couldn't go empty handed. What do you buy a king? Especially a king you haven't met. A king whose birth has been told by the stars and creation itself. This is no ordinary person and no ordinary king. This is a very special king.

So what would you buy for this very special king?

The wise men chose gold, incense and myrrh. Maybe we'd still like to receive gifts of gold and perfume today. They sound ok for a grown up, but not necessarily for a baby. Imagine visiting a close friend or family member who has just had a baby with these kinds of gifts? They'd probably expect that the gifts were for the mum and dad, rather than the child.

So did the wise men stuff up? Did they damage their reputation as 'wise men'? Did they succumb to the stress, and make a snap decision when choosing gifts for this very special king?

Well, these gifts make more sense when we see the meaning behind them. They're symbols of value representing our earthly possessions, our life on earth, and also life after death. Gold for our possessions, Incense for our life on earth and Myrrh for life after death. The wise men were actually being very wise by saying that this little baby was a king who would rule over the earth, and life and death itself. Powerful presents for a powerful king. A king who would grow up to save the world.

However, the wise men didn't only have the stress of choosing the gift. They had the stress of travel. It wasn't just a quick trip around the block or to a neighbouring town. They had to track him down across continents! They were completely committed to finding this new born king.

First they went to Jerusalem where the King of the Jews lived. When they arrived there, they asked King Herod, who after reading the bible, read to them that the new king was to be born in Bethlehem.

So off they went again, traveling to Bethlehem. The star they had been following guided them and stopped over the place where this very special king was.

Surprisingly, he was living in very humble conditions. I wonder what the wise men thought, after travelling so far, to end up in a place like this? Yet here they bowed down and worshiped the baby Jesus. These wise men from the east, who had carefully chosen their gifts, and travelled far to get there, worshiped the baby as their king. In doing so, they not only gave the material gifts, but also gave themselves.

These wise men from far away in the east planned to bring gifts to the king but ended up receiving a greater gift in return. They met God, in the baby Jesus, face to face.

The wise men had gone through all that stress but ultimately they didn't need to bring a thing. They were given the gift of meeting Jesus Christ and having a relationship with him, their lives changed forever.

Along with the wise men, there was another story going on at the time of Jesus' birth. Shepherds were in paddocks outside of the town. They were looking after and protecting the smelly sheep in damp and cold paddocks. Suddenly angels appeared with a message and told them to go and visit a new born baby in Bethlehem.

I can imagine this news led them into a mad scramble.

Smelly shepherds meeting a new born baby whom the Angels said was going to be the saviour of the world. What could they bring as a gift? There were no shops open at that time of night and they had nothing of value on them.

All they could do was to simply bring themselves.

So off they went, as the angels had told them. Smelly, dirty, and probably the last people you would expect to meet a new born king. Instead of giving a gift, they received the greatest gift of all time. They too got to meet Jesus. And as a result of receiving the gift of Jesus, they went out and told everyone they met what they had experienced.

The joy of meeting the little baby Jesus who was going to save the world had been born.

This is still true for us today. Today we hear that Jesus, the promised saviour of the world, has come to save us. Not just the people who saw him 2000 years ago, but he came for you and me too.

I still remember the birth of my children with great joy. Yes, there were sleepless nights, pain for my wife, and our lives had changed forever. But there is joy in new birth. Its cause for celebration not just for the parents, but also for the wider family and community. And in Mary and Joseph's case, shepherds from outside of town and wise men from far away in the east.

What an impact Jesus had made in all of those lives, especially the life of Mary. What a gift Jesus was for all of them. So much so that Mary's heart sang for joy.

The gift of Jesus is not only for them, but for all of us. That's what we celebrate at Christmas – hence the name Christ in the word. At Christmas we celebrate the prince of peace, the son of God, the saviour of the world coming into the world for us.

What an amazing gift that is right in front of us that we don't even have to rush out and buy. A free gift that can make the world of difference in anyone's life, including ours.

So what to buy this Christmas?

Now on my list are some of the most special gifts I could give. Not the latest home or entertainment appliance. Not the latest technology device. Not jewellery or perfume. But a gift that is more valuable than any of these. As the wise men and shepherds gave themselves, I too can give myself. We can often overlook what is most important. And what is important is our relationships with each other. Giving ourselves to love and serve each other is a gift that is much more valuable than any material gift and lasts much longer than anything else.

That's what Jesus gives to us, himself. Jesus gives us all his peace, joy, and hope. He gives the gift of his love and friendship which he gives no matter what we have done. Even if we have ignored and hurt him or other people in our lives. Jesus is quick to forgive and help us.

All the material gifts in the world, all the money in the world, can't buy the love, joy, peace, and hope that comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ. He is a gift not only for this world. But for all time.

And the free gift of Jesus can be shared with others too. We can share his love by forgiving, serving, and sacrificing ourselves for others. By doing this we are giving the greatest gift of all time – Jesus, the very special king.